

NEW JERSEY BEST PRACTICES
2001-2002
THE DECADES MUSEUM

Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

Whoever said that “change is good,” must have foreseen our Decades Museum program. Today’s students are living in a time of rapid change and development, a time when change is commonplace and barely noticeable it happens so quickly. This is so very different from the “good ol’ days” of their parents and grandparents who witnessed change that was revolutionary and prominently displayed. Because of that difference between generations, our social studies staff and principal felt the need to show the students the changes. Our seventh grade curriculum contains: content which spans the Reconstruction era to modern times with all its historical events and famous people and, to complement that, we have created a Decades Museum based on technology and the routine of regular people’s daily lives represented by artifacts. While our classroom content teaches the history, our museum exposes students to kitchen artifacts, fashion items and the living areas that were part of the average person’s upbringing during each decade of the 20th century.

The practice that we are proposing for recognition is our Decades Museum. This program encourages our seventh graders to touch and use a range of artifacts that span the 20th century, research significant people and events from the century, and write historical fiction.

First, our seventh grade students are divided into different decades and assigned topics from their decade to research. This research will eventually be part of the Timeline and Famous People section of the museum.

Secondly, our eighth grade curatorial club sets up the Decades Museum on the cafetorium stage. The design of the museum is to reflect a person’s home. We have as part of our collection candlestick telephones, a series of wind-up victrolas, men and ladies garments including swimsuits from each decade, and a stove and refrigerator from each decade. The eighth grade club also maintains a web site for archival purposes that can be accessed for further research.

Next, our seventh grade students visit the museum to discover what common life their ancestors had and what items they used. Following a series of questions in a journal that they are keeping the students look to see, for instance, how items have changed from decade to decade, and what the items are made of and how they work.

As they visit, the students are gathering information for two purposes: to track an item through time noting its changes and significance to society, and to begin work on their historical fiction writing assignment. Each visit has them include their fictional family’s interaction with historical people and artifacts as well as witness to historic events from the time period. All this information is contained in their museum journal. This journal grows throughout the year as we visit the museum 2-4 times each month. The year will end with the completion of their families accounts and their ability to explain how and why items have changed over time.

The educational objectives of the Decades Museum are many fold:

1. Students will more fully understand the concept of change and the role change plays in common, daily life.
2. Students will develop research skills as they learn about historical events and people and create broadside for the museum Timeline and Famous People section.
3. Students will develop critical thinking skills as they learn to assess and evaluate the significance of products over time.
4. Students will create and write historical fiction based on artifacts and researched topics.
5. Students will gain insight into museum careers.

This innovative program promotes high student achievement as it encourages, develops and channels students' curiosity. The visual and kinesthetic experience of touching and using artifacts meets many students at their particular learning level. As they experience the museum, they search for ways to share it and often times invite their parents to visit and see what the museum contains. Adding to this experience, the students produce a story of a family that may not be unlike their own except that it is from a different time period. By including historical people and events, the students take to heart these facts and include them in their "story." As they feel more comfortable in the museum, their stories grow to include a wide range of events and artifacts. These connections add to their involvement in the classroom both as historians and writers.

List the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard (s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

The Decades Museum addresses a wide range of standards both for seventh grade students who use the museum and the eighth grade students that set up the displays.

CCWR Standard 2: All students will use technology, information and other tools. This year the eighth graders are designing a companion web site to both archive the artifacts and make them visually available to seventh graders using them for the writing assignments.

CCWR Standard 3: All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Each visit allows the students to consider the role an artifact plays in each decade. Discussions focus on how items work and their impact on the people. The eighth graders setting up the museum must decide what goes up and what stays in storage.

Visual and Performing Arts Standard 1.1: All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. In designing and setting up the museum, students must decide how the museum will look so that it items and texts are visible and easy to use.

Language And Arts Literacy Standard 3.3: All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes. Each decade students write about their fictional family that lives in the home our museum resembles. They discuss famous people and historical events the family hears of and they write about items they use in their home.

Language And Arts Literacy Standard 3.5: All students will view, understand, and use nontextual visual information. While in the museum students see artifacts such as telephones and victrolas. Students also have access to images on-line via the museum web page. There are also many images and posters regarding people, events and advertisements from past decades.

Mathematics Standard 4.10: All students will use a variety of estimation strategies and recognize situations in which estimation is appropriate. Students compare prices and value of past artifacts to modern day items. Using different proportions and calculations, student estimate prices.

Science Standard 5.3: All students will develop an understanding of how people of various cultures have contributed to the advancement of science and technology and how major discoveries and events have advanced science and technology. As students notice changes in items over time, discussion involves the invention of materials that influence design and durability of items.

Social Studies Standard 6.2: All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history, and philosophy, and related fields. The Decades Museum is unique in its presentation since it allows us to collect samples of items that real people have used throughout the growth and development of this nation. Also, as students are exposed to the music, dance and stories of the past they can see the culture of their grandparents and parents. As students view, touch and learn about these items they are gathering information of the past, seeing themselves in the present and, hopefully, looking ahead to the future.

Social Studies Standard 6.3: All students will acquire historical understanding of political and diplomatic ideas, forces, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world. As students write their family narrative they must include interaction with historical people and events. This creative writing encourages students to learn history and incorporate it into their story.

Social Studies Standard 6.4: All students will acquire historical understanding of societal ideas and forces throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world. The Decades Museum is a museum reflecting our society. The artifacts that have been donated, bought, borrowed or made depict the rich life that Americans have lived and shared with the world. Students are able to take their museum experience and see its application in class activities and discussions with parents and grandparents. These events allow students to gather a multitude of perspectives on the past.

Social Studies Standard 6.6: All students will acquire historical understanding of economic forces, ideas, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world. Our nation's past contains a wealth of advertising that reflects the values of the past. Students discuss and learn about these values as they see them depicted in the museum through the display of magazine advertisements paired with the artifacts they sold.

Describe the education needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met those needs.

According to Howard Gardner there are at least seven intelligences (mathematical, linguistic, musical, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal). Each person has one that is a strength, while we all need to work on the others to complement the strength. The Decades Museum allows students to use each intelligence: figuring out comparative cost from then to now, writing about the research topic and their historical fiction, listening to period music and its themes, seeing famous people and event in picture and seeing artifacts, touching artifacts, sharing stories with classmates and helping each learn about an artifact, finally, reflecting on their own item of interest. As students use the multiple intelligences they are improving writing skills, research skills, communication skills, critical think and questioning skills.

When it comes to discovering the worth of the museum we have three objective assessments and several subjective assessments. Objectively, the students keep a journal with a set of questions that they complete during each visit to the museum. There is also the students' historical fiction which serves as a periodic check on understanding and progress. Each student is required to include in their story a minimum of two historical people, two historical events and 2 artifacts. Their story is to include these in such a way as the student must demonstrate an understanding of the facts and use of each. Further, our social studies final asks the students to trace through time the changes in a particular item from the museum. Ninety-five percent of the students are able to discuss five or more changes of an item and explain how or why it changed. Subjectively, returning students have played a volunteer role in running the museum and the companion web site. Other older students return to share with parents or siblings the artifacts and the stories they learned from years past.

Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

Best advice: Start small. The first step for any school considering such a project would be to gather ideas from the many sources on the internet that are focused on artifacts and documents, such as the Smithsonian Institution and our web site. The next step is going beyond the images and incorporating individual items into the classroom that complement the teacher's instruction. Eventually a school or teacher may build a collection that is part of the classroom and a separate space for general student use. Local museums and historical societies may also provide opportunities such as lending artifacts for classroom use. Keep in mind, that the ideal is to go beyond just visiting a museum and seeing artifacts. We want the students to learn to use the item and then judge the artifact's qualities considering what the artifact did and the impact it must have had on the people of the time period.